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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001288

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#)
SUBJECT: TFLE01: ISRAEL-LEBANON: KING'S STATEMENT AND
BAHRAINI REACTION

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Developments in Lebanon dominate the news in Bahrain, with focus on Bahrainis in Lebanon, statements by Hezbollah leader Nasrallah, and high-level diplomacy with the visit of Jordan's King Abdullah. King Hamad issued a statement July 14 urging an avoidance of risks and actions that affect Lebanon's sovereignty. Bahrain's four boycotting opposition political societies hailed the capture of Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon. Shia clerics led two demonstrations expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian and Lebanese people. Most Bahraini Shia reportedly admire Nasrallah for what he has done "because this is the only language Israel understands." While the Sunni Bahraini leadership will approach the issue in lock-step with such key allies as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, the government faces a potentially tricky domestic situation, especially if a further escalation arouses strong passions in the country's majority Shia population. End summary.

Palace, MFA Statements

¶2. (U) King Hamad met with Jordan's King Abdullah during a brief stop in Manama the evening of July 14 to consult on the escalation of events in Lebanon, Israel and Palestine. In a statement released July 15, both monarchs stressed the need to resolve disputes through diplomatic means, urged self-restraint and warned of the danger of escalating violence.

¶3. (U) Earlier July 14, echoing the Saudi and Egyptian-Jordanian statements issued July 13, King Hamad called publicly for an immediate halt to the escalation of military actions between Lebanon and Israel. He urged "key international parties to use their influence to encourage negotiations and the adoption of an Arab peace initiative as a solution, so that peace prevails in the region." He said Bahrain "opposes any acts that endanger Lebanon and its sovereignty" and denounces any use of force targeting civilians or civil establishments. The King urged a return to rationality to avoid miscalculated risks and actions that affect Lebanon's sovereignty.

¶4. (U) In a statement to Bahrain television, Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa said that the instability in the region has caused severe damage to Lebanon's infrastructure and has resulted in the death of innocent civilians. King Hamad and FM Shaikh Khalid had met to discuss actions being taken to facilitate the return of

Bahrainis from Lebanon.

MPs and Opposition Political Societies Speak

¶15. (U) The press reported that First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Representatives (COR) Abdulhadi Marhoon will call for an urgent meeting of the COR to discuss means of support to Lebanon. He called on other Arab parliaments to use their influence to put international pressure on Israel to cease their actions.

¶16. (U) According to pro-Shia newspaper Al-Wasat and pro-Baathist Akhbar Al Khaleej, the alliance of four political societies that boycotted the 2002 elections issued a joint statement hailing the capture of Israeli soldiers in Palestine and Lebanon. It said that there was happiness in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, Lebanon, and the Arab and Islamic worlds after the killing of an Israeli soldier and the capture of two others. "Due to American aid to some Arab regimes that signed peace agreements with the Zionist entity, these regimes have pulled themselves from the struggle, have weakened the resistance, and have failed to achieve freedom and democracy for their peoples." The statement also demanded that Arab governments allocate financial support for the Palestinians and Lebanese.

Friday Sermons

¶17. (U) Sunni Shaikh Juma Tawfiq said July 14 that even though Arab and Islamic nations condemn Israel's actions, no action is being taken to protect Lebanon as its infrastructure is destroyed, and it is isolated from the rest of the world. He criticized the Arab League saying there is really no need for its representatives to meet since their reaction is predictable and there will be no concrete action. He finished his address saying that the "weapons of the state have rusted and its ammunition has become ineffective."

¶18. (U) Shia Shaikh Mohamed Al Mahfoodh, sympathetic to the Shirazi branch of Shiism, questioned Arab governments' hesitancy to use the armies and weapons at their disposal to challenge Israel. He claimed that Arab publics are out in front of their governments in terms of confronting Israel. He questioned how much Arab governments value their citizens compared to the apparent value of Israeli citizens to the "Zionist entity."

¶19. (U) Sunni Shaikh Salah Al Jowder criticized Israel over the aggression against innocent people in Lebanon and Palestine. "Isn't it Israel who is the sponsor of international terrorism? Isn't Israel the sponsor of destruction and sabotage in the world?" He called on international, Muslim, and Arab organizations to intervene to halt the Israeli actions against Lebanon and to lift the siege on the Palestinians.

Post-Friday Prayer Protests

¶10. (U) Shia clerics led demonstrations following Friday prayers July 14 in Manama and Diraz, home to the mosque where leading Shia cleric Shaikh Isa Qassim delivers his messages, to express their solidarity with the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples. Leading cleric and Al Wefaq political society General Secretary Shaikh Ali Salman, along with other Shia clerics, led the Diraz protest in which it was estimated that between 700 and 3,000 people participated. Shaikh Ali Salman reportedly called for continuing protests.

Columnists Weigh In

¶11. (U) Akhbar Al Khaleej columnist Mohamed Al Shehabi wrote July 14 that Hezbollah leader Sayed Hasan Nasrallah's "Sincere Promise" has been achieved and that it is just a matter of time before victory over the "Zionist enemy" will be realized. He anticipates that Israel will attempt to launch further attacks on Southern Lebanon in an attempt to raise the morale of Israel's soldiers and portray its strength, but eventually will fail. The impact of the "Sincere Promise" will have a major effect on the region's politics and will reach to Washington.

¶12. (U) Fellow Akhbar Al Khaleej writer Hafeedh Al Shaikh July 13 described Hezbollah's capture of the Israeli soldiers as a heroic operation. Israel's anger will be doubled now with soldiers captive in both the Gaza Strip and in Lebanon. Al Shaikh calls Hezbollah's capture of the soldiers a "gift to Hamas and all the Palestinian people" because it will necessitate negotiations leading to the release of 10,000 Arab captives in the hands of Israel, including women and children.

Nasrallah's Stock Rises

¶13. Embassy contacts from the Shia community stated that Bahrain's Shias were glued to their television sets yesterday watching Nasrallah's speech. While a small minority believe taking Israeli soldiers hostage was a mistake, according to our contacts, the vast majority, including many moderate people, admire him for what he has done because "this is the only language Israel understands." They understand the consequences will be detrimental to Lebanon and the region, but many believe "Arab resistance" must be supported regardless of the price to be paid. They distinguished between Nasrallah as a leader and the Hezbollah movement, noting that Nasrallah's enhanced stature did not necessarily translate into greater support for Hezbollah's political ascendance. Positive popular reaction, they said, is reminiscent of the atmosphere when the Israelis left southern Lebanon in May 2000.

Comment

¶14. (C) Although there has been extensive local media coverage and attention to the fighting between Hezbollah and the Israelis and the ongoing actions in the Gaza Strip, protests and commentaries have, thus far, not turned anti-American. On a policy level, the leadership will be lock-step with key allies such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt in reacting to developments in Lebanon. But the Sunni Bahraini leadership faces a tricky domestic terrain. In the politically volatile run-up to this fall's parliamentary elections, the government will not welcome an issue that could potentially arouse strong Shia passions. With the election date still not formally set, a further escalation could add more uncertainty into the mix.

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